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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7390
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0220
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0056
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1758
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2154
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1310
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3591
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 3360
RUEHBA/AMCONSUL PERTH 0491
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 003390

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, NEA, NEA/IR, NEA/IPA
NSC FOR EPHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#) [IS](#) [XF](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL -- VISIT BY INDONESIAN MUSLIM SCHOLARS
MAKES SOME WAVES

REF: A. JAKARTA 3291

[1](#)B. SURABAYA 63
[1](#)C. JAKARTA 1646

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate General Surabaya.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: The visit of five moderate Indonesian Muslim leaders to Israel December 2-8 has created small ripples of criticism in Indonesia, with a few officials and religious leaders quietly criticizing the visit. The visit--organized by a private U.S.- based NGO--was officially frowned upon because Indonesia does not recognize Israel. Such quiet visits, like a similar trip by senior Indonesian journalists in October, are effectively nudging Indonesia to soften its official no-contact policy with Israel, though there is no sign of that happening soon. END SUMMARY.

ULAMAS IN ISRAEL

[1](#)3. (C) Five moderate, influential Indonesian Muslim scholars (ulamas) visited Israel December 2-8, according to the Indonesian organizer, C. Holland Taylor, CEO of the North Carolina-based NGO Libforall Foundation. Taylor told DepPol/C that the five ulamas visited religious shrines of the three major religions, met with President Shimon Peres on December 7, and with important Israeli and Palestinian civil society leaders. The purpose of this initiative was to engage Indonesian civil society to promote pluralism in the Middle East and counter extremism. The partner who organized the Israeli itinerary was the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

[1](#)4. (C) Taylor said the five ulamas were regional leaders from Indonesia's two main Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, whose combined membership accounts for about 80 million Indonesian Muslims. Two of the ulamas agreed to go public on their visit: Syafiq Mughni, Chairman of East Java Muhammadiyah, and Adbul A'la, deputy director of graduate studies at National Islamic University

in Surabaya and the leader (kiai) of a large religious boarding school (pesantren) in Madura, East Java. Taylor said the other three wanted to remain anonymous--and their names have not been published--but included top leaders from NU youth wing Ansor, a former head of Muhammadiyah Youth, and the head of an NU chapter in Sulawesi.

SCHOLARS FEEL WELCOME

15. (C) Syafiq and A'la both told ConGen Surabaya that they learned a great deal from the visit. Syafiq described his meeting with Peres as "meaningful and cordial" and said he felt surprised by how comfortable he felt in Israel. Syafiq concluded that there could be no meaningful peace talks until Hamas and Fatah come to terms with each other. He said until Hamas and Fatah reach an accord, there will be no chance of Palestinians negotiating seriously with Israelis. He suggested that Indonesia could play a role to bring the two sides together if it "got serious" and worked with other Muslim countries, but he was not optimistic.

16. (C) A'la said he probably was invited because of his conflict resolution experience. He also felt welcomed and respected by everyone he met. He viewed economic development as the missing link to the equation for peace. Most people want peace but small groups are perpetuating the conflict, stifling dialogue. A'la expressed a willingness to return to Israel if the opportunity presented itself.

SOME CRITICISM

17. (C) The visit has ruffled some feathers among GOI officials and religious leaders but has not caused a major stir. In response to the DCM's SMS query about the visit, to GOI special Middle East envoy Alwi Shihab, Shihab responded that the ulamas who participated are "unimportant persons" and that the visit was "meaningless." Syafiq, who said

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Muhammadiyah approved his visit at some level, said he received some criticism from hardliners. A'la said average Indonesians have reacted positively to his visit. A'la noted that the extremist Hidayatullah organization, which in its online publication criticized the visit, labeled Libforall as a "Zionist foundation which spreads Liberalism and Pluralism in Indonesia." The article ironically also translated most of a very positive article verbatim from the Jerusalem Post, including a quote from Peres that Israel's enemy is not Islam but terrorism. Taylor said Gus Dur, the former Indonesian president, gave his blessing for the visit and will help to absorb "any flack" Libforall or the ulamas might take for it.

18. (SBU) Muhammadiyah Chairman Din Syamsuddin and a senior NU official both publicly denied knowing about the visit, The Jakarta Post reported. The only other article on the visit in the national press was written by a member of the Moderate Muslim Society, who wrote in leading newspaper, "Kompas," that "Indonesia can use this visit to help end the Middle East conflict."

RECENT INTERACTIONS

19. (C) Several recent developments have opened small windows for Indonesian civil society interaction with Israel. The Wiesensthal Center cooperated with Gus Dur's Wahid Institute and Libforall to stage a June conference in Bali on "Tolerance Between Religions" which included Hindu, Muslim and Jewish survivors of suicide bombings and a holocaust survivor (ref C). Israel hosted seven senior Indonesian journalists from major national newspapers and television stations on a trip in October (ref B). Several articles were published about this visit. The Israeli Ambassador to Singapore told Ambassador Hume on November 30 about quiet attempts to engage with Indonesia economically and politically (ref A).

¶10. (C) Libforall would like to continue promoting the Indonesian-Israeli civil society exchanges as a means of creating breathing space for moderates on both sides, Taylor said. He wants to invite to Indonesia a moderate Palestinian who the ulama delegation met in Israel, Mohammad Dajani, director of American Studies Institute at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem.

HUME